



DATE: March 01, 2022

TO: Housing Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy & Division Advisor, The Alliance

RE: HB 5208: An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Persons (support)

Good Morning, Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy & Division Advisor at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving over half a million people in need and employing 115,000 people across the State. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 5208: An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Persons. This legislation would prohibit housing providers from considering a prospective tenant's criminal conviction after certain time periods. We commend the Committee for introducing this legislation and acknowledging the importance of increasing opportunities to address the intersection of homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Barriers to stable and affordable housing continue to be among the most difficult challenges for returning citizens upon release from prison or jail. Returning to the community upon release presents many obstacles related to housing, in addition to employment, treatment for health and behavioral health issues, and family reunification.

The National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction references more than 550 collateral consequences for those living with a criminal record.ⁱ HB 5347 would be a significant step backwards in the fight to address issues related to the intersection between the criminal justice system and homelessness, which are among the most impactful consequences.

One in three Americans has some type of criminal record, which can create lifelong barriers to opportunity for them and their families. A criminal record should not be a life sentence to poverty. People who have served their time deserve a fair opportunity for a better future. To better achieve equity, especially across race and income, barriers to housing, employment and education must be removed.

We are concerned about the extensive number of people who are being discharged into homelessness following release from incarceration. The correlation between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system is well documented. In March 2019, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) provided the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) with three years of data (Jan 1, 2016 to Jan 1, 2019) from the Homeless Management Information System, to cross match with the state's criminal justice databases. The findings reinforce that formerly incarcerated people are likely to wind up experiencing homelessness:

- 8,187 (48%) people who utilized shelters between 2016 to 2019 had a DOC criminal record.
- 3,562 (21%) people who utilized shelters within 2016 to 2019 were also released from DOC within the same time frame.

In addition, for people who are under parole or probation supervision, homelessness can make it difficult to comply with the terms of supervision. For this population, the circumstances lead to technical violations and/or revocations of parole or probation and more time spent in prison.

Addressing the impact of this intersection between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system involves the services of nonprofits. Community Justice providers support justice-involved individuals and their families, as well as survivors of crime. These programs, funded by the Department of Correction and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, continue to play an essential role in the ongoing success related to criminal justice reform in Connecticut.

Our members that provide services related to housing and homelessness, funded by the Department of Housing, assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness to improve their life situations by providing temporary and long-term housing, and an array of clinical and supportive services. These nonprofit organizations serve on the front lines of reentry, and provide critical support to individuals, families, and communities across Connecticut.

According to the January 2022 OPM Monthly Indicators Reportⁱⁱ, community providers are serving approximately 3,300 people in programs which are funded by Department of Corrections. Thousands more receive services through providers that contract with the Court Support Services Division of Judicial Branch.

Once again, The Alliance urges the committee to support passage of HB 5208. The ability of the state to ensure continuation of the criminal justice reforms that have positioned Connecticut as a national leader, is greatly dependent on a sustainable system of services, as provided by the nonprofit sector.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Julia Z. Wilcox, Senior Public Policy & Division Advisor

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ⁱ National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction:

https://niccc.csgjusticecenter.org/database/results/?jurisdiction=260&consequence_category=&narrow_category=&triggering_offense_category=&consequence_type=&duration_category=&page_number=1

ⁱⁱ January 2022 OPM Monthly Indicators Report: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/CJPPD/CjResearch/MonthlyIndicators/2022-MONTHLY-INDICATOR-REPORTS/Monthly-Indicators-Report-2022-January.pdf>